

Newspaper Says FBI Funded Terror Unit

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SAN DIEGO, Jan. 10 (AP)—The FBI created and funded an ultra-right-wing group called the Secret Army Organization to prey on dissidents in the early 1970s, the San Diego Union reports.

In a copyrighted story, the first of a series beginning Sunday, the Union described the SAO as a "centrally designed and externally financed infrastructure designed for terror and sabotage."

These acts, it said, were "sanctioned by the nation's most powerful and highly respected law enforcement agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation."

In 1971 and 1972, the SAO "waged protracted guerrilla warfare against antiwar protesters in San Diego," the Union said.

The group, whose members were heavily armed with automatic weapons and explosives, allegedly burglarized the homes and offices of Vietnam war protesters, bombed and ransacked activist offices, including a local underground newspaper, and firebombed cars, the newspaper said.

They also made death threats against local dissidents and political figures, plotted to kidnap certain radicals and shot a young San Diego woman, the newspaper said.

In Washington, an FBI spokesman said, "We deny the allegations in the story."

The Union also says that the SAO, founded after the right-wing Minutemen group was forced to disband in 1969, drew

up battle plans to disrupt demonstrations at the 1972 Republican National Convention, then scheduled for San Diego.

The Union story identified the key SAO leader as Howard Berry Godfrey. It was he, the paper said, who paid the expenses of the secret army, recruited new members, supplied the explosives and picked out targets.

The same man also was a paid FBI informant, the story said.

Quoting grand jury testimony from July, 1972, the story said Godfrey testified that he helped found the SAO on orders from the FBI.

While he led the group, Godfrey testified that he was in constant touch with his FBI supervisor, special agent Steve Christensen, making daily reports on his activities.

The Senate intelligence committee, which has been investigating the FBI's secret campaign against dissident groups, has studied a report from the American Civil Liberties Union claiming that the bureau initiated death plots against San Diego leftists.

Committee spokesman Spencer Davis also said that two committee investigators, one a former assistant U.S. attorney who investigated the early stages of the Watergate scandal, visited San Diego late last year and returned to Washington with information on both the FBI and the SAO.

He would not say whether the information involved FBI death plots made through the SAO, saying only that "committee members are taking the information very seriously."